

TRANSFORMATIONS OF MIND

Philosophy as Spiritual Practice

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CHAPTER ONE

A philosophy that is not a philosophy'

I

I had thought to say that philosophers need to remember that they are also human, but how does that make them different from anyone else? And yet, thinkers, philosophers, stand in a particular relation to their own humanity because they offer representations of our human relation to reality, and their vocation rides upon an interior acknowledgment of human *weakness*. If humankind cannot bear very much reality, then what philosophers cannot bear cannot be disclosed or represented by them either, our experience will be too narrow, our discernment too weak, and so our philosophy fail through the failure of our humanity. So we fail if we are too weak, but one of the conditions of success is a due recognition of weakness . . .

. . . It depends on our response to our limitations and the manner in which we discover them. But it has been an abiding fear of mine, that the state of my own humanity, the way I think and feel, the way I *act*, or fail to act (soured by my deeds) may also affect, adversely, my philosophy, my capacity to see, to see error, to see ordinary truths. (And is the nature of that fear that I shall be *found out*? There are surely other reasons, of a more pressing kind, to take care of the self – for the sake of others, for instance, who are harmed in proportion to our not taking that care.)

But one thing at a time. It is frightening, that the way I am, the way we are, may distort perception, perhaps deeply distort it, and we not know it, be quite blind. And there is nothing more chilling than to hear the deluded speak, with complete confidence in themselves. Maybe the distinction between appearance and reality, in its human applications, is grasped in an overcoming of delusion that depends upon interior conditions, upon upheaval and radical change . . .

One problem is that philosophy is so *contested*. It is not that contest, or *agon*, is bad in itself, *au contraire*. But there are different conceptions of what it is to do philosophy at all, and there are these *guardians* of particular conceptions of philosophy, who are not prepared to recognise anything that falls outside the terms of the conception they guard, in a tense conceit of selfhood. Certainly there are many activities embraced within the field of philosophy, all of which have their place; the difficulty comes when people identify philosophy itself with one particular set of activities. For example, I can imagine a familiar kind of philosopher who would honestly not see what the fuss I am making about interior conditions and human frailty was all about. Surely, they would say, philosophical questioning is straightforward enough once you get the hang of it. There are questions about the nature of mind, about the logical relations between statements, the structure of our concepts, that can be dealt with quite ‘objectively’, without all this reference to the moral virtue of the philosopher. Well the claim was not so much about virtue as about its absence, but essentially they are *right* about what they specify. The mistake is to *reduce* philosophy to this particular set of activities, often premised upon assumptions about how the world really is that *may* after all derive from a too ‘narrow body of accepted consciousness’. In any event, maybe philosophy depends upon an *awakening*. I thus make a Buddhist connection, but also allude to Heidegger’s treatment of truth as *aleitheia* – the truth is something that had escaped one’s notice and is now apparent, something you awaken to, a sudden sense of the before unapprehended relations of things. You are not looking in philosophy for correct but unrevealing definitions, but for illuminations of the field of sense, increase in understanding, the sight of what was formerly concealed from view. The shape of an expression’s magnetic field shines for a few moments, then disappears again. The task of the philosopher is to trace the pattern that reveals itself only for moments and then slips from sight. This, I ought to say, brings Heidegger close to Wittgenstein’s notion of grammar and perspicuous representation, a connection caught, perhaps, by Gottfried Benn’s (1963, 99) ‘*Ein Wort, ein Satz: Aus Chiffren steigen / erkanntes Leben, jüher Sinn*’: ‘A word, a phrase – out of ciphers rises recognised life, sudden sense’. It also brings Heidegger and Wittgenstein very close to the Kantian concept of an aesthetic idea, but that is for later.

I am not opposed to conceptual analysis, to the analytic tradition, far from it, the world needs it. The mistake is to suppose that you can go on

in headlong and start analysing concepts and their logical relations, *before* you realise the form of your own subjectivity. Something prior is required, an *ascesis*, that is not easy to describe, but its spirit can be evoked. An attitude of humility does not catch it, the term has been too much abused, it is a certain quality of receptive attention that needs to be cultivated first. Inwardness or interiority are the conditions upon which philosophy depends: analyse, if you like, what then swims into view, and certainly do not dissect your impressions until they have worked on your soul.

I am telling a very old story, to which it is so hard to *listen*, even though listening is the very theme. Matthew Arnold sees it clearly, this inwardness of spirit, which is in peril from our mechanical and material civilisation, and now from our electronic compulsions, but is the condition of the imagination, in free play, the condition of culture, an inward operation, from which we are ruthlessly distracted. Thus Arnold, but it is Kant he is following.

2

The Japanese philosopher, Tanabe Hajime (1986), wrote a book first published in 1946, which he called *Philosophy as Metanoetics*.¹ It has a startling thesis, announced with humility in his moving Preface. Language is such a delicate instrument, is it not, and words can so easily be misunderstood, especially those which we know by rote and have no profound relation to. The startling thesis is that if you want to be a philosopher you need to confess your sins and repent.

This is profound as well as startling, since it more or less gives us everything. Why do we have to confess our sins and repent in order to do philosophy? Well, the claim is that it is already a part of philosophy. The condition of self is a crux. Repentance and transformation already invoke essential polarities, that there are states of the self in which it is submerged in ignorance and delusion and strikes out wildly, and a state of being awake, and the painful transition, from a scattering of distracted and dissipated energies to some kind of unity, from a state in which one is incapable of acting well to one in which one sometimes finds oneself doing what is needed without, it seems, any effort of one's own.

¹ The title alludes to the New Testament notion of *metanoia*, which has the sense of a profound change of mind, a conversion suggesting repentance for the past.

That way of putting things, stressing repentance, has a context, the situation of the Japanese at the end of the last war, and the notion of 'repentance' was a political theme, not always sincere. Tanabe describes his feelings as the war finally turned against Japan, the moral dilemma about whether or not to speak out against the government's public evasiveness, its inability to reform, its suppression of criticism, all freedom of thought, its secrecy; but it also seemed traitorous to express ideas that might 'end up causing further divisions and conflicts among our people that would only further expose them to their enemies' (1). Tanabe tells us he was tormented by his own indecision, and wondered whether he should go on teaching philosophy or give it up 'since I had no adequate solution to a dilemma that philosophically did not appear all that difficult'. He spent his days wrestling with his doubts, driven to the point of exhaustion, and in his despair concluded that 'he was not fit to engage in the sublime task of philosophy':

At that moment something astonishing happened. In the midst of my distress I let go and surrendered myself humbly to my own inability. I was suddenly brought to new insight! My penitent confession – metanoesis (*zange*) – unexpectedly threw me back on my own interiority and away from things external. There was no longer any question of my teaching and correcting others under the circumstances – I who could not deliver myself to do the correct thing. (*ibid.*)

'I was suddenly brought to new insight.' The dilemma was resolved, it became clear what he should do. Presumably the resolution *came* to him. It was not so much that he *decided* that he should do the one thing or the other: the point is that he no longer had to make a decision. We are dealing with the interior conditions upon which doing philosophy may turn out to depend – if philosophy articulates truths whose disclosure depends upon just those conditions. And notice the lack of choice implied in that forceful metaphor of being thrown back:

The decision was reached, as I have said, through metanoia, or the way of *zange*, and led to a *philosophy that is not a philosophy*: philosophy seen as the self-realisation of *metanoetic consciousness*. It is no longer I who pursue philosophy, but rather *zange* that thinks through me. In my practice of metanoesis, it is metanoesis itself that is seeking its own realisation. Such is the non-philosophical philosophy that is reborn out of the denial of philosophy as I had previously understood it. I call it a philosophy that is not a philosophy because, on the one hand, it has arisen from the vestiges of a philosophy I had cast away in despair, and on the other, it maintains the purpose of functioning as a reflection on what is ultimate and as a radical self-awareness, which are the goals proper to philosophy. (*ibid.*)

Tanabe is drawing on New Testament turns of phrase, specifically the Pauline, 'It is not I who live but Christ who lives in me.' He is also drawing on the New Testament notion of *metanoia* and relating it to the Japanese term *zange*. We are going to need to relate the idea of being thrown back upon one's own interiority to that of a radical transformation, or at least a shift of perspective, of the kind referred to by Tanabe in a way which connects it to penitence and confession. (*Zange-do* is a *practice* of penitence and confession, an integral part of a Buddhist life, for Tanabe, a thought we need to dwell on, openly making amends for wrong-doing, as he does in his own text, not being ashamed of the limitations of his humanity, but seeing them as a condition of transformation and movement.) There is a more immediately problematic issue. Tanabe says that 'it is *zange* that speaks through me', that 'it is metanoesis itself that is seeking its own realisation'. The suggestion seems to be that an awakening consciousness is working its way through the philosophy, that the consciousness to be achieved is already active, bringing itself to awareness, and that it is triggered by the recognition of failure and human limitation. In other words, the consciousness is already an ethical one, and it is intimated in the midst of action by the experience of remorse. It suggests at least that our doing philosophy will alter as this consciousness advances, showing things to be described we would not otherwise have seen. The process of awakening is an awakening to what is the case, particularly, perhaps, to what you have *done*, or what the community you are a part of or are associated with has done, which becomes part of your own past. You realise the damage you have done, with a vivid awareness, perhaps, that you cannot repair it. (Remorse tells you something about what you have done or failed to do, but is at the same time an introduction to yourself.)

Tanabe spells his thought out in more detail, in terms that derive from the tradition of Pure Land Buddhism. Specifically, his experience of exhaustion and despair leads him to the distinction between 'self-power' (*jiriki*) and 'other-power' (*tariki*).² In introducing his discovered conception of 'a philosophy that is not a philosophy' Tanabe writes:

To be sure, this is not a philosophy to be undertaken on my own power (*jiriki*). That power has already been abandoned in despair. It is rather a philosophy to be practised by Other-power (*tariki*), which has turned me in a completely new direction through metanoesis, and has induced me to make a fresh start from

² In the context of devotion to Amida Buddha, the contrast is between what depends upon one's own efforts and what depends upon the compassionate help of Amida himself.

the realisation of my utter helplessness . . . This Other-power brings about a conversion in me that heads me in a new direction along a path hitherto unknown to me . . . This is what I am calling 'metanoetics', the philosophy of Other-power. I have died to philosophy and been resurrected by *zange*. It is not a question of simply carrying on the same philosophy I had abandoned in my despair, as if resuming a journey after a temporary interruption. It cannot be a mere repetition without negation and change. In the life of the spirit, 'repetition' must mean self-transcendence; 'resurrection' must mean regeneration to a new life. (*li*)

The New Testament allusions are clear here too, but the ideas are transposed into the context of Pure Land Buddhism, in which faith in the saving power of Amitabha is paramount. Such faith must give us pause in the context of philosophical reflection. We need to dwell on the nature of such faith and raise serious sceptical questions. More immediately we should note the metaphors of path and journey, the distinction between a well-trodden path and a familiar destination on the one hand, and the idea of a new direction and an unfamiliar path on the other. Sometimes it is not clear that what lies ahead is genuinely a path, and nor are you sure where you are supposed to be going, or even whether there is anywhere to go, but you are lost and cannot follow the old way. The Buddhist concept of *śraddha* or 'faith' is traditionally construed as an increasing confidence in a path, one moves forward hesitantly, without certainty, with misgiving, and then the path becomes more definite, broader, clearer.

In fact Tanabe does not make it very clear how the vision of philosophy as metanoetics really arose in his own case. It seems from what he has written that in a despair that followed a serious struggle with his moral dilemma, he experiences an unexpected shift of perspective, in which the dilemma resolves itself, and in which he suddenly *sees* that the goals of philosophy, understood by him as 'reflection on what is ultimate and as a radical self-awareness' depend on the sort of interior change and awakening he has undergone: for one thing, it brings home to him the need to distinguish between 'self-power' and 'Other-power'. The felt need to make sense of the experience of *tariki*, I suggest, forces him to see how the interior state of the inquirer determines the capacity to see. He cannot continue to do philosophy, if I may gloss it thus, simply as an objective investigation into conceptual relations, because he has realised that perception of the truth depends upon a shift in the interior conditions of inquiry, conditions that become manifest even in the midst of thoroughly acknowledged human failure.

There is a surely pressing question for a philosopher already apparent. Tanabe invokes the concept of *tariki*, but how are we to assess the corresponding notion of an invisible higher being, Amitabha the Compassionate One, who comes to his assistance and in doing so shows him the limitations of *jiriki*? Moreover, it might be said that Tanabe sounds like a Christian, and perhaps deliberately so, with a particular audience in mind: we could as well be invoking the Compassion of Christ as that of Amitabha. Christ and Amida are in the same case, it would seem. 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.' If philosophical scepticism is the virtue of epistemological vigilance, as I think it is, we need to look carefully at the conditions of these invocations.

The question can be sharpened up further by looking at an example with some points of comparison, in which the question turns not on the figures of Amida and Christ but on God. However, before doing that there is a further point. Our assessment of what Tanabe, or a similarly disposed Christian, has to say, depends very much on the *application* of the key terms they are using. We cannot just take it for granted that we know what this is. When people start talking about repentance and confession of sins we need to be sure about what they are *calling* 'sin' in the first place, and what they count as 'repentance', before we make our excuses and run. There is a remark in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* that one man may agree with another word for word and both be guilty of the grossest possible kind of misunderstanding. They might both agree about the connections between sin, repentance and confession, for instance, but be radically apart in the phenomena they call by these names . . . and not notice until it is too late. (So we do not grasp the *sense* of such expressions independently of the kind of reference.)

3

Tanabe's moving account of his exhausted despair recalls the condition of Tolstoy (1987) as he describes it in his *Confession*, though perhaps Tolstoy was in a worse case:

over the course of a whole year, almost every minute I asked myself whether I had not better kill myself with a rope or a bullet. And at the same time as I was experiencing the thoughts and observations I have described, my heart was agonized by a tormenting feeling. I can only describe this feeling as a quest for God. I say that this quest for God was not a debate but an emotion because it did not arise from my stream of thoughts – it was in fact quite contrary to them – but from my heart . . . (63)

Pace Tolstoy, there need be no antithesis between 'a debate' and 'an emotion'. The emotional insistence which went against his 'stream of thoughts' was in fact also a process of thought, towards the idea of God as a cause, the cause of his own being. Tolstoy could well be brought into play in a discussion of the efficacy of the traditional proofs, which have sometimes been represented as merely intellectual and remote from religion. Tolstoy's emotion has the *form* of a cosmological argument. His official position is that Kant and Hume have disposed of the proofs, but his heart forces him to ask questions about his origins. That does not make the argument 'valid', of course. But this is a *maternal* cause he is talking about: 'I cannot hide myself from the fact that someone who loved me gave birth to me. Who is this someone? Again, God.'

Even though he was convinced that Kant had shown that the existence of God was indemonstrable, Tolstoy was drawn to think in those terms and his thinking thus, under the conditions of stress that he described, had an outcome:

'He knows and He sees my search, my struggle and my grief. He does exist', I told myself. And I had only to recognise this for an instant and life would rise up within me and I would feel the possibility and joy of living.

Not two or three, but tens of hundreds of times, my mood suddenly changed from joy and animation to despair and a consciousness of the impossibility of living.

It is clear that I do not live when I lose belief in God's existence, and I should have killed myself long ago, were it not for a dim hope of finding him. I live truly only when I am conscious of him and seek him. What then is it you are seeking? a voice exclaimed inside me. There he is! He, without whom it is impossible to live. To know God and to live are one and the same thing. God is life. (64)

Life rising up within him seems also to be both a visitation and the form of an interior, responsive change: 'to know God and to live are one and the same thing. God is life.' Some might take Tolstoy to be implying here that the expression 'knowing God' just *means* 'living', in some presumably exalted sense of that term. But the traditional theological understanding of a phrase like 'God is life' is that it implies that God lives in a higher way than we can understand and is the source and giver of a life we can come to share. So a person knows God to the extent that they enter into, participate in, the life of which he is the source. 'Knowing God' is thus also a state of the person. An essential qualification takes us

to the Johannine thought that a person who does not *love* does not know God, so there is an implied connection between love and this entry into life, and a corresponding contrast, easily overlooked, between these positive human phenomena and those more negative, unregenerate ones which mark their absence. The life thus determined is thought to be independent of the vicissitudes of worldly success and failure. So knowing God is certainly not to be *reduced* to any kind of *conviction* of what is the case, though clearly someone who 'knows God' in the sense that their interior disposition and way of life fulfil the criteria is likely to have the corresponding conviction. On the other hand, they needn't. Someone may satisfy the criteria and never give a thought to 'the existence of God', or even think theistically at all.

Our account of the use of theological discourse should not be allowed to founder on the assumption that there is something that counts as *the* use of such language. We have to take account of differences manifested in *lives*, especially since *life* is such a crucial spiritual category, take account of the ways in which the meaning of words is 'printed in the subtle fibres of our nerves'. Or better, we need recourse to different lives in order to show the differences in use. But particular lives may not be accessible to us: as G. H. Lewes said, in a sentence whose meaning it takes a *Daniel Deronda* to spell out: 'We only see what interests us, and we have only insight in proportion to our sympathy.' The extent to which the use of religious language can be described or illustrated is itself limited by our own experience. Who knows, for instance, the realities to which Hopkins gives expression when he says 'we hear our hearts grate on themselves . . .' Not everyone can say without foreboding that they comprehend the realities to which he thus refers. Not everyone will know at all what he refers to, what he expresses an attitude *towards*. Similarly, when Tolstoy refers to entering into 'life' we need to be cautious about assuming that we know what he is referring to. Tolstoy is interesting because we cannot really be sure what is going on with him and we must beware of making assumptions about what *must* be going on. A Freudian might be right to pinpoint certain remarks, for instance his description of himself as a 'fledgling': 'if I lie on my back crying in the tall grass, like a fledgling, it is because I know that my mother brought me into the world, kept me warm, fed me and loved me. But where is she, that mother?' In finding God, he has, in reality, the Freudian might say, found the comfort of the mother after the experience of abandonment. The trouble with this though is that while it may in fact be accurate about Tolstoy, there is a danger of a premature closure on the recognition of

other possibilities. We may not know what is going on, and it may be that Tolstoy is taking the first steps into forms of life that are currently inaccessible to us as particular individuals, but marked and flagged in various traditions, and there may in consequence be problems about our capacity to show the use of the language he draws on. This scepticism is not grounded in the thought that Tolstoy's experience is essentially private. On the contrary, I am cautioning against the assumption that we are all already familiar with the conditions upon which particular experiences depend. Tolstoy clearly draws on the language of the New Testament and the idea of having life 'more abundantly'. The problem for the philosopher is to give an account of what constitutes this more abundant life: what are the phenomena here referred to, the experience of which is counted as 'knowing God'?

But all this begs the question, someone will say, of how we can be sure that anyone *genuinely* or *really* 'knows God', let alone, to return to Tanabe, genuinely or really knows that Amida or Christ has intervened in their lives. Do we not have to establish first that there really is a God to know, or that it is at least rational to believe that there is? and so forth?

William James (1929, 187) has commented on the Tolstoy passage along with one from Bunyan:

The fact of interest for us is that as a matter of fact they could and did find *something* welling up in the inner reaches of their consciousness, by which such extreme sadness could be overcome. Tolstoy does well to talk of it as *that by which men live*; for that is exactly what it is, a stimulus, an excitement, a faith, a force that re-infuses the positive willingness to live, even in full presence of the evil perceptions that erewhile made life seem unbearable.

James seems accurately to describe the situation both of Tolstoy and Tanabe in his remark that 'they could and did find *something* welling up in the inner reaches of their consciousness' – by which such extreme sadness could be overcome. James's breakthrough seemed to be to offer just this sort of at least quasi-empirical account of what is going on, leaving on one side questions of theological implication. Nevertheless, the question of what 'we' are to make of all this depends very much upon who 'we' are and upon our life experience. The realities of failure, despair, etc., may be alien to us and we may falsely project an accommodating and complacent reading of their situation that satisfies us prematurely.

George Eliot's remark about how we learn words by rote but that their meaning must be paid for with our life-blood, and printed in the subtle fibres of our nerves, can be connected with Kierkegaard's distinction between subjective and objective thinking. And *that* may help us explore

further how, for instance, the sense of the distinction between *jiriki* and *tariki* has to be lived through, how *metanoia* or repentance may be the form of a lived reality that changes how we do philosophy. The point is that there is a certain kind of thinking that remains closed to us until we are ourselves thrown back into inwardness, or our own interiority, as Tanabe puts it.

4

In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Kierkegaard establishes a connection between the idea of ‘the subjective thinker’ and that of ‘the existing individual’ thus:

While objective thought is indifferent to the thinking subject and his existence, the subjective thinker is as an existing individual essentially interested in his own thinking, existing as he does in his thought. (67)

In a note about this passage, after going on to discuss very suggestively the nature of the communication that is appropriate to these different modes of thought, objective and subjective, Kierkegaard twice makes the point that the existing individual (here the ‘religious individual’) is in ‘constant process of becoming’ (‘inwardly’ or ‘in inwardness’). It is clear that these two ideas, ‘existing in thought’, and being in constant process of becoming, are connected. The contexts to which Kierkegaard appeals at this point are the ‘erotic relationship’ and the ‘God-relationship’. Furthermore, the two references I have just made to different forms of *communication* and to different forms of *relationship* make it quite clear that despite the apparent idealist bias of his focus on *thinking*, and the apparent self-absorption of his preoccupation with *inwardness*, Kierkegaard is quite emphatic that the true individual exists *in relationship*, the form of which changes with, because it *expresses*, changes in the form of inwardness.³

Kierkegaard conceives the ‘subjective thinker’ as ‘essentially interested in his own thinking, existing as he does in his thought’. I take the expression, ‘existing as he does in his thought’, to be an attempt to capture the idea that human energies are constructed around those forms of thought which motivate a person to action, so that they exist and move within horizons of thought which focus their energies and determine their reasons for action. I make the connection with *action* in

³ Cf., what Kierkegaard says about the ‘loving maiden’ in the note referred to above.

an attempt to alleviate the residual Cartesianism of Kierkegaard's thinking, which sits ill with his emphasis on *relationship*. However, the subjective thinker is *essentially interested* in this thinking, interested, that is to say, in the terms in which their life is led. Here is our key thought again. Strangely, to be interested in one's own thinking requires one to stand outside it, in a condition of *suspension*:

*und ganz in der verschweigung
ging neuer Anfang, Wink und Wandlung vor.*⁴

'enclosed within this silence/ stirred new beginnings and the sense of change'.

Despite the connotations that an expression like 'subjective thinker' is now likely to have, it seems to me that its sense in Kierkegaard is something like 'the self-aware or self-conscious thinker', so long as we make clear that what we are conscious of as a Kierkegaardian 'existing individual' is the form of our present or habitual thinking. This is an important qualification, since it implies a particular form of self-consciousness, one about which I have already been emphatic. I can be aware of what I am doing, be aware of a particular desire or impulse to action, and be aware of it in terms that reflect my established way of thinking (in the light of which an impulse or desire may appear acceptable or unacceptable, for example). However, to become aware precisely of *my thinking* is to gain a purchase on its totality. This is not an immediately clear notion, but it may be clarified by saying that sometimes a person can develop a distaste or dissatisfaction with the general way in which they interact with others, say, the way they think about others, or themselves, the way they speak about others or themselves, and this unease, if it is *attended* to by one who is 'essentially interested in (their) own thinking', can develop without their always being able to conceptualise the reasons for that pre-reflective unease. Perhaps we could call it a 'pre-reflective *dukkha*', upon which they are now precisely to reflect, allow it space to emerge. In other words, it is possible to develop an attitudinal awareness of my established thinking, but this only makes sense if we can acknowledge, not only that my established ways of thinking can *change*, in a way that determines the form of my own becoming, but also that the submerged terms of that change are already available within the *emergent attitudes* implicit in the new form of self-consciousness. I said at the beginning that what matters beyond all else in philosophy is a spirit of inwardness, and I distinguished

⁴ (From Rilke's first sonnet to Orpheus.)

this from a merely reflective turn of mind. Perhaps the reason for this may now become clearer. Reflection reflects . . . a pattern of thought. We need to learn how to *suspend* thought, and then to see what emerges out of this silence. Spiritual traditions claim that new possibilities of thinking emerge, ways of thinking that may now provide a point of view upon the thinking that preceded them. This gives a certain sense to Kierkegaard's talk of a *double* reflection: not only must we learn how to reflect, we must learn the means of reflecting upon the forms of our own reflection, learn to be attentive to them. If we were to reflect on our unease, or seek to trace it back to its source, we may well find ourselves in a different space, in which the unease has clarified itself into a conscious attitude to a determinate object, giving form to a self of larger scope, to an enlargement of being which may also at first present itself in the form of an Other-power that stands over against what one had taken to be one's very self.

Kierkegaard contrasts the subjective thinker, the existing individual, who is essentially interested in his own thinking, existing as he does in his thought, with someone who, in a religious or ethical context, *merely* thinks 'in an objective manner'. The latter, remember, is 'indifferent to the thinking subject and his existence', and Kierkegaard implies a corresponding indifference on the part of the thinking subject to the form and content of their own thought. The subjective thinker is contrasted with someone, that is to say, in whom there does not occur what Kierkegaard claims is essential to religious thinking, viz., the subjective appropriation in inwardness of that which is thought, a process in which the individual is transformed *pari passu* with the development of their thought, the thought in which they exist, the thought by which, I suppose, they are worlded. Indeed, the trajectory of the 'constant process of becoming' to which Kierkegaard refers may be said to be traceable *along the path* of what constitutes the *appropriation* of the existing individual's thought. Thus coming to 'know God' in Tolstoy's example, is a process of subjective appropriation, a matter of an internal change to be understood in terms of an access to 'life' through 'love'. None of this occurs in the 'objective thinker's appropriation' of religion. Of course the objective thinker also undergoes change, but whereas the process of attention and inwardness characteristic of the subjective thinker gives space for the formation of emergent possibilities, to an awakening, the fate of the objective thinker is to lose awareness and unknowingly submit to a diminishment of the power of perception and action.

The point we can retrieve from Kierkegaard about 'subjective thinking' is that it is an activity of thought which, so far from being *external* to the formation of the individual thus engaged, is just what *forms* them as a person. It seems to me that we can connect that point with Tanabe's sense of his being thought rather than thinking – 'it is no longer I who pursue philosophy, but rather *zange* that thinks through me'. What we get is the sense of an emergent consciousness or being in the world, a self of larger scope that seems at least initially to be set over against one's very self, something that comes to one, but prompted by an attentive inwardness, a waiting on what waits.

This is important: such claims, and I include those of Tanabe, are presumably made on the basis of a *tradition* of accumulated experience of determinate changes in determinate circumstances. *That such changes occur* is the *empirical* ground of Kierkegaard's enterprise, and is the condition of his sensitivity to the difficulties of communication between persons established at different points along the line of transformation, a line of transformation which (if it exists, and we can hardly be neutral here) determines for us the criteria for what it is to be a person in the first place.

It is not that the 'objective thinker' does not 'reflect' upon their life or has no self-awareness. *The terms* in which they reflect upon their life simply *reduplicate* the established way of thinking; *that* is what they fail to reflect upon, the totality of the established way of thinking itself, of which they thus become merely the creature. They do not pay attention to their own impulses of thought, to doubts or contradictions, they do not *listen* to themselves, their own thoughts or their own actions, the margins of consciousness, the snatches of new thoughts and feelings. And this is the essential point: if they did reflect upon their established way of thinking it would have to be 'in terms', though, of course, in *other* terms than those available in the established way of thinking; it would have to be from a point of view, which we should have to understand as an *emergent* point of view, so that the moment of (attitudinal) self-consciousness of the totality of one's way of thinking is also a moment of *revelation*. One way of making sense of what Kierkegaard is trying to say about 'inwardness' and 'subjective appropriation' is to think of certain beliefs or thoughts or facts as having, under relevant conditions, a known *motivational efficacy*, and as having this precisely because such beliefs or thoughts or facts represent the *intentional objects* of an emergent sensibility or form of inwardness. To think such thoughts 'subjectively' is to allow their content to affect one's inwardness, and is to have regard

to the form of their impact. The criteria of identity for the thought include the form of that inwardness. To put it in Wittgensteinian terms, the form of one's inwardness represents the *grammar* of one's 'thought' in the sense that one's inwardness is constituted by the constellation of conceptually related other thoughts, images, impulses, etc., which give one's 'thought' its specific identity within a set of relations as the thought that it is. When such a 'thought' is thought 'in an objective manner', on the other hand, *there is no such hinterland*. This is not to say that there is *no* hinterland in the objective thinker: it will simply not be that which belongs to the grammar of the unappropriated thought. It will be the usual preoccupations of the conscious mind.

Kierkegaard talks of the existing individual as in a constant process of becoming, and it is clear that the direction of that becoming is determined by the subtle movements and intimations of the forms of energy that we call *thought*. But it is just here that we can recall the problem of whether indeed we have a genuine path before us or a real direction to go in. The situation is an interior one: essentially, we find ourselves in a position in which there is no well-established and clearly marked path for us to follow after the pronouncement that God is dead, no clear lines of formation left by which we can construct ourselves. All that is left to us is what can be yielded by *attention* and listening: it is just here, in the processes of thought and possible becoming that we can summon the image of hazarding ourselves along what may or may not be a path, what may or may not lead to *aporia*, a 'no through path'. However, it seems to me that as far as Kierkegaard is concerned that is the situation *anyway*, whatever we may think about the death of God: the idea of a well-marked path precisely gives too much room to the objective thinker. They can learn by rote the terms of traditional *Bildung* and not know its always unfamiliar realities. Kierkegaard's remarks about the existing individual being in constant process of becoming allows us to think of ourselves as *constituted* by a series of transformations, regenerate or unregenerate, allows us to think of ourselves, indeed, as radically subject to the process of dependent origination. The forms of consciousness arise in dependence upon conditions, and among those conditions is a certain 'double reflection' or attentive self-awareness upon which there seems to depend the emergence or awakening of attitudes and states of mind that are already a protesting critique of our unregenerate actions, the established impulses, if you like, of the State of Nature, for which we feel a remorse that seems to be working its way within us towards expression.

5

I remarked earlier that there was some unclarity in Tolstoy's account. Does he imply, for instance, that 'knowing God' just *means* living a certain sort of (interior) 'life'? If he does imply that, someone may say, then he is a kind of reductionist or non-realist about theological language, even a crypto-Buddhist without realising it, believing that references to God can be translated into references to a certain way of life, a certain experience of life. This is something to return to, but in understanding the position we need to remember that everything turns on the profundity or otherwise of that 'experience of life'. There can, in other words, be spiritually significant forms of reductionism, as well as trivialising ones. It depends upon the depths swirling below those 'inner reaches of consciousness' mentioned by James. I would say that the investigation of those depths is the real task of the philosophy of religion, and that it has to be a kind of spiritual exercise.

I am inclined, though, to doubt that this is Tolstoy's position. It is true that he was dismayed by the religious attitudes of his own class and the official Church. Lives did not seem to be in any way affected by the faith that they professed, in that sense he was surrounded by people who professed to 'know God' but whose lives showed that by the traditional criteria they did not. It was the poor and uneducated who lived their religion, he thought. Tolstoy came to realise, as he saw it, that knowledge of God depended upon interior change of the kind he sought to describe, upon the reaching of certain human limits. There is no reason to doubt that he was realist about God, in an entirely classical way: knowledge of God in his essence is a gift of grace, Aquinas tells us, and belongs only to the good. It is clear that Tolstoy found *something* welling up, etc., *and* that for him the test or the justifying condition of the claim that someone 'knows God' is whether they 'love', live a certain sort of life. However, a person's entry into this, as it may be, quite real *life*, does not entail that they 'know God', unless we simply stipulate that the former is all we are referring to when we talk of knowing God, and thus become crypto-Buddhist again. To put it another way, what *establishes*, in a certain tradition, the truth of the claim that a person knows God, is their access to this new 'life', but it is not what *makes* it true under that description. Some philosophers may be inclined to say at this point that it is indeed a further question whether Tolstoy knows God. The *criterion* by means of which we are supposed to judge that someone knows God is not identical with the truth condition, and can indeed be described

without reference to that truth condition: we can describe the phenomena as they manifest themselves to us without making any reference to theological language, even if it were to turn out to be the case (and how would we find it out?) that to leave out that reference was finally an error.

One way of responding to this on the part of theologians is to invoke *faith* at a crucial point in the proceedings, to say that indeed there is no identity between the assertion condition and the truth condition and that there is no independent means by which we can show that there is a God for Tolstoy to know (e.g. natural theology does not deliver any such knowledge or rational belief). Someone who said that might emphasise that this is just our human condition, our predicament is the predicament of *faith*. There is no means of reassuring ourselves that we are right to believe that living this special life is a criterion of knowing God. It is not just that we are disposed to call such a life 'knowing God': it is our *faith*. The problem with this position, though, is why anyone should be talking about *God* in the first place, as opposed to the human phenomena that Tanabe and Tolstoy describe. Human beings sit round their camp fires . . . the Archbishop reassures us that God loves us as a father loves his children . . . 'this is our *faith*', you may say. A further problem is whether this is the right place to *locate* faith. Isn't it the case that the context of Tolstoy's deliverance is a Christian, theological one, into which language life is breathed by his experience? We *start* with the interior turning about. That is our *given*, whether we are Christians, Buddhists or what it might be. We need to be very cautious indeed, either about minimising its significance or about building up a superstructure of dogmatic *Aberglaube*.⁵ Tanabe's account, I suggest, now becomes germane. The phenomenology of his experience forces him into seeing point in a distinction between self-power and Other-power. It is *as though* help comes from outside us at the extreme point where self-power can no longer prevail. This is a crucial human experience, but one has to ask the question whether the distinction is not a perspectival illusion necessary, or at least unavoidable, at a critical stage, but then to be overcome. St Paul asks, 'who can deliver me from the body of this death?' The idea of an outside intervention seems to depend upon an unavoidable identification with a particular sensibility, which you take to be your very self, in such a way that the emergence of one that is more expansive

⁵ Literally *Aberglaube* means 'superstition', but Matthew Arnold used it as a general term to refer to the structure of dogma that begins with belief in a personal first cause. (See his 1873 *Literature and Dogma*.)

appears a grace from outside. Exhausted by efforts constrained by a particular self-view, we experience an expansion that seems at least a grace of nature. Theologies are built on this. As for philosophy as metanoetics, we learn the subjective conditions of inquiry and knowledge. At the least we discover ourselves, though that 'at least' surely signals ignorance of what such discovery may amount to. Tanabe's philosophy as metanoetics depended upon a particular experience of being thrown back, as he put it, upon his own interiority. It was a shift of consciousness from which emerged 'a philosophy which is not a philosophy'. But Tanabe was modest as well as humble, perhaps too modest. His philosophy that is not a philosophy is so described because he gives some recognition still to what it is not. I suspect his real point is that what it is not is not really philosophy at all. But irony doesn't always catch the attention of a self-confident audience.